

An Open Letter to Workingmen.

BY ONE OF THEMSELVES.

THE Canadian electorate are about to be asked to say by their votes, whether what is known as the National Policy is to be continued or abandoned—whether the Dominion is to retain the present system of protection to native industry, strengthening it where experience has shown it to be weak, and perfecting it where it has been found to be imperfect; or whether abandoning this policy we shall approximate toward what is, by a misapplication of terms, called Free Trade. In deciding this momentous question, no class of the people will have a more potent voice, as none have a deeper interest, than the artisans and mechanics—the skilled labourers of Canada.

It is a duty, then, which they owe at once to their country and to themselves and their families, to consider well what will be the effect of their votes in the coming elections. To allow mere considerations of party triumph or defeat to influence their action at the polls, would be a paltering with the trust of the franchise, almost amounting to treason to their country's best interests. No matter what partisans and partizan journals may say in their eagerness to get or retain power, the affairs of the country, so far as the administrative acts of the Government are concerned, will be in the future, as they have been in the past, conducted about equally well by either of the political parties. The one side will continue to make and the other to deny charges of corruption and extravagance. But the impartial student of the history of political parties in Canada must arrive at the conclusion that whatever of truth there may have been in such charges when made by and against both the parties in their turn, there does not exist on either side such an excess of vice or surplussage of virtue as would of itself furnish adequate cause for preferring one to the other.

The elector who would be honest with himself and true to his country, will not allow himself to be led by the storm of crimination and recrimination; of charges and countercharges; of denials and reiterations, away from the calm, dispassionate and thoughtful consideration of the policies of the two parties who are asking his support. A mistake in the selection of men can be remedied, and at the worst is transient in its effects; an error in the choice of a policy may mar the whole future of a country, and may turn what would have been happiness, prosperity and national greatness into wretchedness, industrial disaster and national decay.

So long as men retain the right to think freely there will exist differences of opinion, and these differences may and do divide men into hostile, or at any rate opposing camps of thought. If the matter in dispute concerns the Government or politics of the country, these camps naturally become political parties. Indeed, it may be said that only in this way can honest political parties be formed, for a body of politicians banded together for any object less than the advancement of a principle, can hardly be more than a political banditti.

Differences of opinion on what is called the trade question, have divided men into Free Traders on the one side and Protectionists on the other, and in Canada, with some few exceptions, we find the latter in the ranks of the Government and its supporters, and the former in the ranks of the Opposition. **While other questions of policy will naturally enter into the discussion which must decide the action of the electors in the present contest, there is no question, on which the parties divide, which compares in importance to the mechanics and artizans of the Dominion with this one. SHALL THE PRINCIPAL OF PROTECTION TO NATIVE INDUSTRY BE MAINTAINED OR ABANDONED.**

It is not the intention in this leaflet to enter into an abstract discussion of Free Trade and Protection, nor is it necessary to do so, for it is admitted on both sides that a policy of absolute Free Trade is not, under our circumstances, possible for Canada. It would be unfair to his readers as well as to those who, for want of some name which will describe them with absolute correctness, he may designate as Free Traders, for the writer to assume that the electors are called upon to decide for or against Free Trade. Were this the question, it is possible some who are in Canada—and because of Canada's peculiar circumstances—Protectionists would be found advocating Free Trade.

Not only is it idle to discuss the question as if absolute Free Trade were a possible alternative; but it is equally bootless to discuss it, as some do, on the supposition that reciprocal trade relations with the United States are to be had for the asking. Canadians must be manly enough to look on the whole matter in a self-reliant way, for they are the blindest of the blind, the wilfully blind, who cannot see that reciprocity with the United States, on any terms less onerous to us than a complete and humiliating surrender of our commercial independence, is hopeless. Canadians, Canadian workingmen especially, cannot afford to wait for other countries to make this or that change of policy on our part possible; they must deal with the facts as they exist, and adopt and maintain a policy suited to our actual circumstances.

The great question for Canadian workingmen to ask themselves, Whether the present policy, or the approximation to Free Trade which it is proposed to substitute for it, is best calculated to advance their material prosperity?

They can arrive at an answer in two ways:

First—By considering whether, tested by the light of the experience of the eight years of its existence, it has on the whole benefited them, either by giving them steady work, or, by giving them better wages, or by creating an increased demand for their labour, prevented a fall in wages, which is but another way of saying the same thing.

Second—By considering whether the policy of shutting out foreign-made goods, and so increasing the quantity of home-made goods; or the policy of allowing foreign goods to supplant home-manufactured articles in our markets, is most likely to create a demand for their labour.

Every workingman knows that in almost every town and village in Canada new establishments, and in some instances new industries, have sprung up since the adoption of the National Policy, and because of its adoption. Not only that, but many, almost all of the old industries have been enabled by the increased demand for their manufactures to greatly increase their capacity. **To say that this does not mean an increased demand for labor is to insult the intelligence of the people. To say that the tendency**

of such an increased demand is not to raise the price of labor—the wages—is to fly in the face of a well-understood and universally admitted law.

To deny that employers of labour will try to get that labour at the lowest rate possible; i.e., that they will endeavor to keep down the rate of wages, would be absurd. It would be to say that they are less anxious than other people to do the best they can for themselves. It may as well be frankly admitted that an employer in a Protected country, like an employer in a Free Trade country, will always endeavor to get his labour as cheaply as possible. Were this not equally true in both instances there would be less need for Trades Unions and other labour organizations in one case than in the other. But while this is admitted and while it may further be true, that, whether under Free Trade or Protection, workingmen must depend largely on themselves and on their own combined efforts to obtain increases of wages; it will be well for them to reflect that **no attempt to secure a rise in wages can be successful unless the employers are able to pay it.**

The writer does not desire to be understood as contending that the adoption of a policy which, by making manufacturers and other employers of labour prosperous and so able to advance the wages of their employees, will cause them to raise the wages unasked. But he does not contend that, unless the manufacturers' business will allow it, no effort on the part of his employee to obtain an increase can be successful. For no man will continue to manufacture at a loss.

It may not be amiss to glance at what would be the result, to labour, of the adoption of a policy detrimental to the interests of manufacturers. Evidently if that policy decreased their profits, they would be compelled to reduce their expenses, and all workingmen, who have thought at all on the subject, know that, when the process of scaling down the expenses begins, the rate of wages is about the first thing to be affected. To protest or to strike is useless, for if the profits will not allow the employer to pay the old rate, he must either have cheaper labour or go out of the business. For, again, no man will continue to manufacture at a loss.

What would the abandonment of the National Policy and the adoption of a policy approximating to Free Trade mean to Canadian manufacturers? And let it never be forgotten that, in the sense referred to above, the interests of manufacturers and workingmen are identical.

Is it not a fact that the taking down of our tariff wall would expose our industries to two dangers?

First,—The competition of the manufacturers of the United States, and :

Second,—The competition of European manufacturers.

The writer divides these two kinds of competition thus, because though each would be equally dangerous and fatal, they are so from widely different reasons.

Except that their establishments are generally on a large scale, the American manufacturers have no advantages, either in cheapness of material or of labour, to enable them to compete with undue advantage with ours in our own markets. But nearly all their principal branches of manufacturing industry have formed combinations to restrict the production and steady prices. These combinations only effect the home trade and each maker is at liberty to manufacture in such quantity and sell at such prices as he pleases for foreign trade. Let, then, our National Policy protective barrier be removed and the Americans would at once begin to unload their surplus on our markets at prices with which our manufacturers could not compete.

Let any Canadian mechanic working at the industry thus attacked, say what would be the effect on that industry and, as a consequence, on his wages.

In Europe it is well known that the wages are very much less than they are in America in all branches of manufacture. In Germany, for instance, they do not average one half as high. It is not necessary to point out to a Canadian workingman, that, if his employer must compete in the home market with an employer of this cheap German labour, without protection, he cannot afford to pay much if any higher wages than his German competitor pays.

It may be argued, it is urged by the opponents of the National Policy, that, but for the United States tariff the combinations spoken of could not exist, and it is argued that the fact that wages are so low in Germany tells against the theory that protection will increase wages.

In answer to this it may be said that even without the combinations the American manufacturers would be able to, and would make Canada a slaughter market, as witness the evil days prior to 1879. And as regards Germany the circumstances of that country differ widely from ours, as German manufacturers now produce in excess of the home demand, their prices, and consequently the wages paid, are fixed by what they can obtain for their goods when exported.

But we are not called upon to vote for a policy for the United States or Germany; nothing that we can do or leave undone will alter the fixed policies of other countries. It is for the workingmen of Canada to say whether they are prepared to abandon the principle of protection to native industry, and thus compel their employers, and consequently themselves, to compete on even terms with the under-paid labor of Europe, and on unequal and grossly unfair terms with the American manufacturers.

The triumph of no set of party leaders can compensate for the evil which would result to our Dominion from the recording by the electorate of an unwise or mistaken verdict on the question. **SHALL THE NATIONAL POLICY BE CONTINUED OR ABANDONED?**

A vote for the National Policy means to demand that the products of foreign pauper labor shall be kept out of Canada; a vote against the National Policy means that these products shall come into unrestricted competition with Canadian labor.

HOW NECESSITIES ARE CHEAPENED BY HOME PRODUCTION.

Through the harmonies of a well ordered economical system the very necessities of a people may make its necessities more available, first: by providing the means for purchasing necessary commodities, and, second: by making them cheaper. A system adapted to favor the national industry, that is, the production of necessary commodities, **gives employment to the artisan**, enabling him to purchase the commodities which he himself produces, as well as those which the farmer produces; **thus enriching the farmer also, making manufactured commodities more available to both artisan and farmer**, and increasing the demand from both classes for the products of manufacture.—*John L. Hayes, LL.D.*

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